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TO ONE WHO FINDS SCIENTIFIC BIBLE STUDY HOSTILE TO DEVOTION.

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MY DEAR BROTHER :

You do well to attach supreme importance to a devotional spirit and to religious edification in connection with the reading of the Bible. The Bible was given for the edification of the man of God (2 Tim. 3 : 16, 17), and is to be used in a religious frame of mind, with prayer and a desire to have the conscience touched and the spiritual life stimulated.

Your jealousy of any mode of handling the Bible which tends to frustrate these practical ends is just and praiseworthy.

There are ways of using the Bible that kill devotion and hinder edification. There is, *e. g.*, the scholastic, theological way, which seeks in the Bible chiefly proof-texts of pet dogmas. It is a very barren, unprofitable way, entirely alien to the true character of the Bible, which is a book of religious literature, not a theological compendium. Kindred to this wrong use, not uncommon in the churches, at least in bygone times, was that of the rabbis who turned the Bible into a law-book, laying down minute, exact rules for conduct. The effect in their case was fatal. It made the rabbis and their disciples blind to the real meaning of Scripture. There was a thick veil on their face in the reading of the Holy Book. They knew the letter, but were ignorant of the spirit; found innumerable precepts, and missed Christ.

You think the scientific study of the Bible is another of these bad ways of using it. It is possible, but it is also possible that you are mistaken. Do you seriously think so? Is that your *experience*, or is it merely a hastily formed opinion as to the supposed effect of scientific study on other people's devotion? Examine yourself carefully on this point.

What does the scientific study of the Bible mean? It means the use of the Bible with the aid of all ascertainable knowledge of *facts* relating to the sacred literature. It would be a pity if that kind of

use killed devotion, for it would signify that the Bible, when fully known, is unable to serve its professed end—the edification of the man of God—and that ignorance is necessary to devotion. This is a sentiment more in harmony with Romanism than with Protestantism.

Few now, in Protestant communities, would contend for that position without qualification; I feel sure that you are not so obscurantist as to be one of the number. Most would admit that some parts of the knowledge Bible science supplies are practically useful. For example, that which comes from translation of the Bible out of Hebrew and Greek into English by scholars learned in the languages. Probably you are ignorant of Hebrew and Greek. Would you prefer the untranslated Bible as an aid to devotion?

Most religious people nowadays have learned to value other aids, such as good commentaries, histories of the times in which the Bible was written, books on the ancient customs of eastern peoples, reports of the discoveries of Layard and others in the mounds of buried cities, illuminating and confirming sacred story. You would not wish to dispense with these as hostile to devotion?

No! your *bête noire* is *criticism*. Well, what is criticism? *Textual* criticism is an endeavor to find out what the different authors of the Bible, the evangelists or Paul, *e. g.*, really wrote, so that we may not mistake for their words what may have been the mistakes of copyists. Surely a good thing, if it can be done! You want to have the words of the inspired writer, not the stupid, careless blunders of scribes, don't you? *Historical* criticism, sometimes called the higher criticism, is an endeavor to find out when and how the various books of the Bible came into existence in the form in which we have them in the sacred collection. Critics believe that there are indications in the Bible itself which enable them in many cases to answer such questions with a considerable degree of probability. Don't you think it were well to have such questions answered as far as possible?

Perhaps you reply: "It might be, did critical conclusions not disturb so seriously traditional opinion as to Bible books, *e. g.*, that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, and that the Levitical law as therein given dates from his time. If the critics would only confirm our preconceived opinions, we should feel much obliged to them, but they upset so many old, time-honored views that really we regard their labors as 'unprofitable,' and as perilous to faith, not to speak of devotion."

That criticism brings trials to faith I do not deny, but criticism is not the only cause of trials to faith in connection with the Bible.

There are trials arising out of doubts about the authors of books, *e. g.*, the fourth gospel; doubts about the right of certain books to be in the canon—such as even the very orthodox and devout Christian fathers of early Christian centuries entertained. There are trials arising out of the very unequal value of Bible books for the purposes of edification. Compare Chronicles or Esther with the book of Psalms, *e. g.* How can there be such wide differences in worth between the various parts of a *divine* book?

Trials of faith in connection with the Bible, as in connection with other things, exist whether we like it or not. They have to be reckoned with and turned to good account, and not merely weakly complained of. They can be turned to good account. Trials are only temporary, and, well used, issue in spiritual benefit. For example, criticism assigns very few of the Psalms to David, and gives to the Psalter a late date, after the exile. This is disturbing to old-fashioned views. But look at the matter this way. The post-exilian time was, on the whole, a very dark period, with little prophetic light, and new evil religious tendencies springing up: pharisaism, rabbinism. It seems as if God had forsaken Israel. But no, he gives them the Psalter, the songbook of the second temple, a bright light shining in the night of legalism. Think of that! Again, the critics say that the second half of Isaiah (chaps. 40 to 66) are not by the author of the first half, but of much later date, the utterances of an unknown prophet of the exile. Again a disturbance to comfortable preconceived opinion. But read these grand chapters as a message from God by an exiled prophet in Babylon to fellow-exiles: how much more pathetic and lifelike they become than when viewed as spoken or written one hundred and fifty years before they were needed!

The fact is that criticism is resurrecting the prophets. There are no books on the prophets so readable, and so edifying, and so full of instruction for our life in this present time as those which have endeavored to interpret them on critical lines. The sooner you make the acquaintance of some of these modern works by critically instructed, yet most devout men, the better it will be both for your Christian intelligence and for your religious edification. You do not know how much you miss by your present attitude of suspicion. It is a great thing to have an open mind, and to be ready to receive good from unexpected quarters. "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" it was asked of old. You know what came out of Nazareth—Jesus Christ the Savior of the world. The question of the present

hour for some religious people is: "Can any good come out of criticism?" To those who ask this question I reply, with Philip: "Come and see." Come with humble, candid, truth-loving mind. Come with faith in the Holy Spirit, believing that he is leading the church into higher discoveries of the treasures of spiritual truth stored up in the Bible. If you come in this spirit, you will one day learn, to your glad surprise, that the Word of God is a far richer and grander book than you had any idea of.